



## Perceived Acceptability of Sexual and Romantic Fantasizing

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### Abstract

To better understand the social norms surrounding fantasizing behavior, the current research aimed to assess how acceptable various types of fantasizing (romantic or sexual) are perceived. Understanding and abiding by social norms helps people avoid criticism, social sanctions, and ostracism. Thus, better understanding the social norms surrounding various types of fantasies can help people better navigate their social worlds, especially with respect to sexuality, dating, and relationships. Participants ( $n=828$ ) reported how acceptable, violating, and bothersome they perceived sexual and romantic fantasizing to be towards themselves and others. Results suggest that despite the current sentiment on socially and morally unacceptable physical acts, mental acts of fantasizing are not perceived as unacceptable or violating. No gender differences arose between men and women's perceptions of fantasy acceptability. Demographic differences in perceived fantasy acceptability by race, sexual orientation, relationship status, and age are discussed. These findings deepen the understanding of how society views fantasizing behavior and help begin to define boundaries for acceptable versus violating thoughts.

**Keywords** Sexual fantasies · Romantic fantasies · Fantasizing · Social norms · Moral issues

### Introduction

Despite the abundance of research and public interest surrounding fantasies, the perceived acceptability and social norms surrounding how people feel about fantasies remains unstudied. Understanding and abiding by social norms helps people avoid criticism, social sanctions, and ostracism (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Thus, better understanding the social norms surrounding various types of fantasies can help people better navigate their social worlds, especially with respect to sexuality,

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dating, and relationships. Although fantasies typically occur in the privacy of one's own mind, they have the potential to manifest into behavior, as well as be the topic of conversation, or otherwise shared, discussed, and analyzed, and could therefore pose real consequences. The current research aimed to assess how acceptable various types of fantasizing are perceived. Further, it investigated whether fantasy type (romantic or sexual) impacted how violated or bothered individuals perceived feeling about being fantasized about. Amidst the current political and social hyper-vigilance towards sexual harassment and assault, better understanding fantasizing behavior is especially timely and important.

## Background on Fantasies

Fantasizing is common and arguably useful at enhancing sexual pleasure (Davidson and Hoffman 1986). Many reasons exist why humans engage in fantasizing behaviors, however, a commonly agreed upon purpose of fantasies is that they serve to elicit or enhance pleasure (Leitenberg and Henning 1995). Several distinct fantasy types exist; the current investigation focuses on sexual and romantic fantasies (Busch and Marks in progress). Sexual fantasies, or sexually arousing or erotic mental imagery (Leitenberg and Henning 1995) are common—98% of people report sexually fantasizing at some point in their lives (Lehmiller 2018). According to a review of several decades of fantasy research, men average 7.2 sexual fantasies (brief to extended sexually arousing or erotic thoughts or imagery) per day while women average 4.5 sexual fantasies per day (Leitenberg and Henning 1995).

Alternatively, romantic fantasies represent non-sexually explicit fantasies with an underlying theme of romance or love (Busch and Marks in progress). Emerging research, social anecdotes, popular media, and theoretical frameworks (such as social role theory, social learning theory, and evolutionary theories) suggest that romantic fantasies occur and may be just as common as sexual fantasies (Busch and Marks in progress). In a recent study which asked participants to report fantasy behavior in the past six months, participants reported fantasizing both sexually and romantically “somewhat often” on a 1–5 point Likert scale ( $M_{\text{sexual}} = 3.12$ ,  $M_{\text{romantic}} = 3.28$ ; Busch and Marks in progress).

## Social Role Theory and Gender-Specific Social and Cultural Scripts

In society, a belief exists that men and women should assume certain roles, possess certain qualities, and behave according to certain described and prescribed “scripts.” Social role theory, based on socialization, suggests that individuals harbor beliefs about roles men and women should hold in society, and propagate gender stereotypes based on those beliefs (Eagly and Wood 2011). The underlying principle of this theory is that socially defined roles and norms drive thoughts and behaviors, and overall define expectations for how a person should reasonably act in a given situation (Burgess and Borgida 1999; Eagly and Wood 2011).

The development of an individual’s sexuality is often aided by role models such as parents, peers, and media (Oliver and Hyde 1993). Children often learn through

imitation, and are often more positively reinforced by their same-gender imitation, or following socially approved gender-roles. Initially learning to behave and think differently based on sex in this manner may lead to different partner preferences and strategies, which may lead to different fantasies.

Through social learning, people learn which sexual preferences, attitudes, and behaviors are socially acceptable based on their roles in society (Eagly 2013). Perceptions about the acceptability of various fantasy behavior may arise from these preferences and roles. Specifically, people's societal roles may help determine what kinds of fantasies are considered appropriate to engage in. Because men are allowed more agentic, dominant roles in society and experience fewer consequences for sexual behavior and promiscuity, sexual fantasizing may be perceived as more acceptable for men to engage in compared to women. Women are generally allowed less powerful roles, more communal roles in society, and receive harsher punishment for sexual behavior and promiscuity. Therefore, romantic fantasizing may be perceived as more acceptable for women to engage in compared to sexual fantasizing. Alternatively, because of the often hidden nature of fantasies, there is little to no risk of consequences from fantasizing behavior, therefore, some people may use fantasies to escape from the restraints of societal norms and explore sexual or romantic desires in an unrestricted manner.

## Evolutionary Explanations

In addition to social roles and gendered norms, evolutionary theories also assist in explaining why different patterns of fantasies may be considered more or less acceptable for men and women. Specifically, evolutionary theories such as sexual selection theory (see Buss 1998 for a review), sexual strategies theory (see Buss and Schmitt 1993 for a review), and parental investment theory (see Trivers 1972 for a review), focus on biological and evolved mechanisms by which men and women increase their genetic fitness. Genetic fitness is improved through different gender dependent preferences and strategies for men and women.

Evolutionary theories suggest that women typically benefit most from long-term, quality strategies, whereas men benefit most from short-term, quantity strategies (Buss and Schmitt 2011). Empirical evidence exists to support gender-specific mating preferences and strategies. Specifically, men prefer a higher number of sexual partners than women throughout their lifetime. When asked how many sexual partners would be ideal in the next 30 years, men report an ideal of 2–9 partners ( $M=7.69$ ), while women report an ideal preference for 1–4 partners ( $M=2.78$ ; Buss and Schmitt 1993; Fenigstein and Preston 2007; Schmitt 2003). Men also tend to hold more open and permissive attitudes towards casual sex than women (Oliver and Hyde 1993), think about sex slightly more often, and are more likely to participate in extramarital sexual relations than women (Fisher et al. 2012).

Potentially as a result of these gender specific mating preferences and strategies, men and women may have different frequencies of romantic and sexual fantasies. For instance, men report more frequent fantasizing behavior in comparison to women (Jones and Barlow 1990; Leitenberg and Henning 1995), and report more multiple

partner sexual fantasies than women (Jones and Barlow 1990). These fantasy patterns can be interpreted as an evolved mating strategy for men to maintain a ‘mating mindset’ and be sexually ready for potential partners in order to maximize their genetic fitness. As fantasies serve to enhance pleasure (Leitenberg and Henning 1995), any sexual fantasy, including non-reproductive fantasies, may facilitate this mating mindset by putting the fantasizer into an aroused state. Alternatively, for women who seek to maximize genetic fitness through quality, long-term mates, romantic fantasizing may facilitate a long-term focused mating strategy. Therefore, sex-specific patterns of mate strategies and preferences posited by evolutionary theories may influence how people view the acceptability of various types of fantasies for men and women.

## Overview and Hypotheses

The current study is a sub-set of a larger study aimed to measure the frequency of various fantasy types. The main goal of the present research was to assess how acceptable various types of fantasizing are perceived, and to determine whether being the subject in someone else’s fantasies led people to feel violated or bothered. Based on social roles, gender norms, and various evolutionary theories, it was predicted that women would perceive fantasizing romantically as more acceptable in comparison to sexual fantasizing (1a) and would feel less violated by somebody having romantic fantasies about them compared to sexual fantasies (1b). Additionally, it was predicted that men would perceive fantasizing sexually as more acceptable than women (2a), and that men would feel low levels of violation by somebody having either fantasy type about them (2b). Differences in perceptions of fantasizing were also examined between when others were the target of fantasizing compared to when the participants imagined themselves as the target of the fantasizing. Further, acceptability of sexual and romantic fantasies across various demographic groups (i.e. sexual orientation, race, relationship status, religious beliefs, age) was examined at an exploratory level to determine the impact of individual demographic differences on fantasy acceptability.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Data from several larger studies was combined to examine the perceived acceptability of fantasizing about others both romantically and sexually. Participants ( $n=828$ ) were recruited on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing marketplace where individuals can complete tasks for a small sum of money, to complete a study about the frequency of their fantasies. All participants were from the United States. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 73 with a mean age of 33.3 ( $SD=10.7$ , median age = 31). Participants identified as cis-male (53.6%), cis-female (46.1%), other genders or gender non-binary (3%). Participants reported their sexual orientation as

heterosexual (69.6%), bisexual (5.8%), gay/lesbian (24.3%), and other sexual orientations (0.3%). Participants identified as White (74.3%), Black (7.7%), Asian (6.6%), Hispanic (5.3%), or other ethnicities (6.1%). Participants reported their religious denomination as atheist or agnostic (36.3%), Christian non-Catholic (27.4%), Catholic (19.4%), spiritual non-religious (8.5%), or other religious beliefs (8.4%). Participants reported being married (35.1%), in a relationship (30.8%), and single (34%). Additionally, because one's own interests towards various relationship partners may influence their perceptions of fantasizing acceptability, participants reported how interested they were in having a romantic and sexual partner at the current time—86.6% reported being interested in having a romantic partner at the time, and 89.8% reported being interested in having a sexual partner at this time.

Individuals reported perceptions of how acceptable fantasizing about others sexually or romantically is, and how violated/bothered they would feel if somebody fantasized about them. These perceptions were assessed with six items ( $\alpha=0.83$ ) on a 1–7 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), including “It is O.K. for people to fantasize about others sexually/romantically”, “I would feel violated if somebody fantasized about me sexually/romantically” (Reverse coded), “I would feel bothered if somebody fantasized about me sexually/romantically” (Reverse coded), with each statement representing two items each, one item for sexual fantasizing and one item for romantic fantasizing. Higher scores indicate greater acceptability towards fantasizing. Participants also reported basic demographic items before being thanked for their time and debriefed. As this was part of several larger studies, participants were paid \$0.25–\$0.75 for 10–20 min surveys.

## Results

### Main Results

To compare perceptions of fantasizing, effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ) was calculated. For reference,  $d=0.2$  is considered a ‘small’ effect size,  $d=0.5$  is considered a ‘medium’ effect size, and  $d=0.8$  is considered a ‘large’ effect size (Cohen 1988). When considering romantic and sexual fantasizing together (six items;  $\alpha=0.83$ ) to assess fantasizing acceptability overall, individuals perceived fantasizing as acceptable and non-violating ( $M_{\text{total}}=5.21$  out of 7 possible,  $SD_{\text{total}}=1.31$ , where higher scores indicate greater acceptance). No differences arose between perceptions of romantic (three items;  $\alpha=0.62$ ) and sexual (three items;  $\alpha=0.63$ ) fantasy acceptability ( $M_{\text{romantic}}=5.24$ ,  $SD_{\text{romantic}}=1.32$ ,  $M_{\text{sexual}}=5.17$ ,  $SD_{\text{sexual}}=1.37$ ,  $d=0.05$ ).

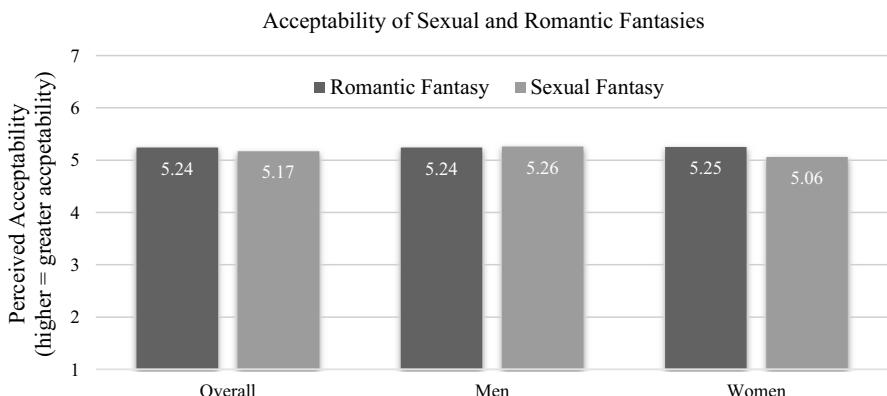
When examining gender differences, no gender difference emerged in perceived acceptability of romantic fantasies ( $M_{\text{men}}=5.24$ ,  $SD_{\text{men}}=1.38$ ,  $M_{\text{women}}=5.25$ ,  $SD_{\text{women}}=1.26$ ,  $d=0.005$ ). For women, no differences emerged between romantic and sexual fantasizing acceptability (women:  $M_{\text{romantic}}=5.25$ ,  $SD_{\text{romantic}}=1.26$ ,  $M_{\text{sexual}}=5.06$ ,  $SD_{\text{sexual}}=1.36$ ,  $d=0.14$ ), thus failing to provide support for prediction 1a. Further, women did not report strong feelings of being violated, nor did women perceive fantasizing romantically as largely

less violating than fantasizing sexually ( $M_{\text{romantic}} = 5.55$ ,  $SD_{\text{romantic}} = 1.52$ ,  $M_{\text{sexual}} = 5.24$ ,  $SD_{\text{sexual}} = 1.65$ ,  $d = 0.19$ ), failing to provide support for prediction 1b.

No large differences emerged between men and women's perceptions of fantasizing sexually ( $M_{\text{men}} = 5.26$ ,  $SD_{\text{men}} = 1.38$ ,  $M_{\text{women}} = 5.06$ ,  $SD_{\text{women}} = 1.36$ ,  $d = 0.15$ ), failing to provide support for prediction 2a. Men reported that they would not feel violated if somebody fantasized about them sexually or romantically ( $M_{\text{violation}} = 5.49$ ,  $SD_{\text{violation}} = 1.67$ , where larger numbers indicate feeling less violated), confirming prediction 2b. Figure 1 visually represents acceptability of sexual and romantic fantasies.

### Differences by Fantasy Target

Although not hypothesized about, differences between acceptability of fantasizing about various targets (i.e. fantasizing about others compared to someone else fantasizing about you) was compared to determine if the target of the fantasy had an impact on fantasy acceptability. Small to medium sized differences emerged between acceptability of fantasizing about others compared to yourself. For romantic fantasizing, it was perceived as less acceptable when somebody else was the target of the fantasy compared to when participants imagined themselves being the target of fantasizing ( $M_{\text{others\_romantic}} = 4.82$ ,  $SD_{\text{others\_romantic}} = 1.93$ ,  $M_{\text{self\_romantic}} = 5.21$ ,  $SD_{\text{self\_romantic}} = 1.57$ ,  $d = 0.37$ ). For sexual fantasizing, it was perceived as less acceptable when somebody else was the target of the fantasy compared to when participants imagined themselves being the target of fantasizing ( $M_{\text{others\_sexual}} = 4.86$ ,  $SD_{\text{others\_sexual}} = 2.00$ ,  $M_{\text{self\_sexual}} = 5.32$ ,  $SD_{\text{self\_sexual}} = 1.65$ ,  $d = 0.25$ ). These findings suggest that participants found it less violating and bothersome when hypothetical others fantasized about them than when hypothetical others fantasized about other people, regardless of type of fantasy, but slightly more-so when the fantasy was romantic in nature.



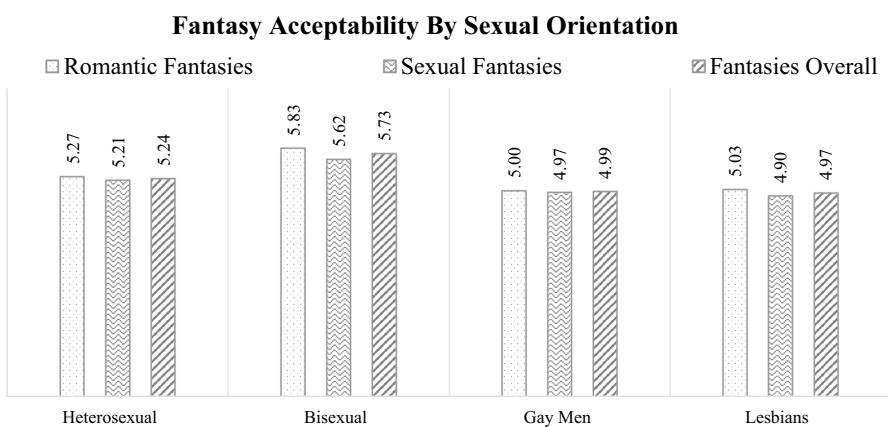
**Fig. 1** Acceptability of sexual and romantic fantasies

## Between Group Differences

To determine if between group differences in demographics such as sexual orientation, religion, race, relationship status, and age impacted perceptions of the acceptability of fantasizing, between group differences in perceptions of the acceptability of fantasizing were also examined. Although effect size was utilized to compare between sexual orientation, religion, race, and relationship status, it is important to note that while some effect size values are considered ‘large’, the sample size in some groups was very small and should be taken into consideration when assessing effect size values. Many of the between group sample sizes were not large enough to be considered generalizable.

## Fantasy Acceptability and Sexual Orientation

Small differences in fantasy acceptability perceptions emerged between sexual orientation groups such that heterosexual individuals found fantasizing slightly more acceptably overall than lesbians. Additionally, small to medium size differences emerged between bisexual individuals and heterosexual individuals, gay men, and lesbians such that bisexuals found fantasizing slightly more acceptably overall than heterosexual individuals, gay men, and lesbians respectively. However, the sample size for bisexual individuals was quite small ( $n=48$ ). Sexual, romantic, overall fantasy acceptability, along with acceptability of fantasies about others and fantasies about oneself between sexual orientation groups is displayed in Fig. 2. Table 1 displays the effect sizes between sexual orientation groups for overall fantasy acceptability (sexual and romantic fantasies combined).



**Fig. 2** Fantasy acceptability by sexual orientation

**Table 1** Sexual orientation between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptabilitySexual orientation between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptability (Cohen's *d*)

	Heterosexual	Bisexual	Gay Men	Lesbians
Heterosexual ( <i>n</i> = 576)	–	– 0.38	0.19	0.22
Bisexual ( <i>n</i> = 48)	–	–	0.57	0.63
Gay Men ( <i>n</i> = 100)	–	–	–	0.02
Lesbians ( <i>n</i> = 100)	–	–	–	–

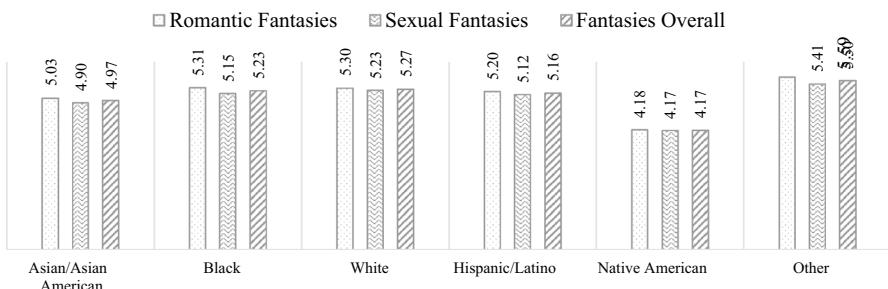
## Fantasy Acceptability and Race/Ethnicity

Race/ethnicity did not largely appear to impact fantasy acceptability. Although some large differences emerge, sample sizes for racial/ethnic groups was not adequate to reliably assess between group differences. See Fig. 3 to view means for sexual, romantic, and overall fantasizing acceptability by race/ethnicity, and Table 2 to see group difference effect sizes. Native Americans perceived fantasizing as overall largely less acceptable compared to all other racial/ethnicity groups, although the group size was quite small (*n* = 24).

## Fantasy Acceptability and Religious Beliefs

Acceptability of fantasizing sexually, romantically, or overall was not largely impacted by religious beliefs, although some differences did emerge. Figure 4 displays mean values for acceptability of sexual, romantic, and overall fantasies, while Table 3 displays between group effect size differences for overall fantasizing acceptability. Although some large differences emerge, sample sizes for some religious groups was not adequate to reliably assess between group differences. Medium to large effects emerged between Catholic individuals and Spiritual Non-Religious, Atheist, as well as Agnostic individuals, indicating that Catholic individuals perceived fantasizing as less acceptable than Spiritual Non-Religious, Atheist, and Agnostic individuals. Small to medium size differences emerged

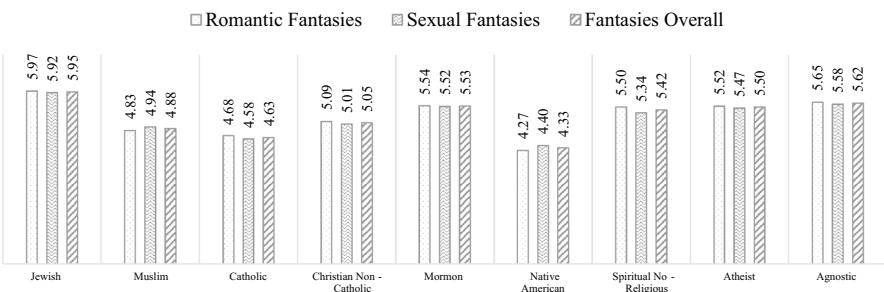
## Fantasy Acceptability By Race/Ethnicity

**Fig. 3** Fantasy acceptability by race/ethnicity

**Table 2** Race/Ethnicity between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptabilityRace/ethnicity between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptability (Cohen's *d*)

	Asian/Asian American	Black	White	Hispanic/Latino	Native American	Other
Asian/Asian American ( <i>n</i> =55)	—	-0.20	-0.24	-0.15	0.64	-0.42
Black ( <i>n</i> =64)	—	—	-0.03	0.05	0.81	-0.21
White ( <i>n</i> =615)	—	—	—	0.08	0.86	-0.18
Hispanic/Latino ( <i>n</i> =44)	—	—	—	—	0.75	-0.25
Native American ( <i>n</i> =24)	—	—	—	—	—	-1.05
Other ( <i>n</i> =20)	—	—	—	—	—	—

### Fantasy Acceptability By Religious Beliefs

**Fig. 4** Fantasy acceptability by religious beliefs

between Christian Non-Catholic individuals and Spiritual Non-Religious, Atheist, as well as Agnostic individuals, indicating that Christian Non-Catholic individuals perceived fantasizing as less acceptable than Spiritual Non-Religious, Atheist, and Agnostic individuals.

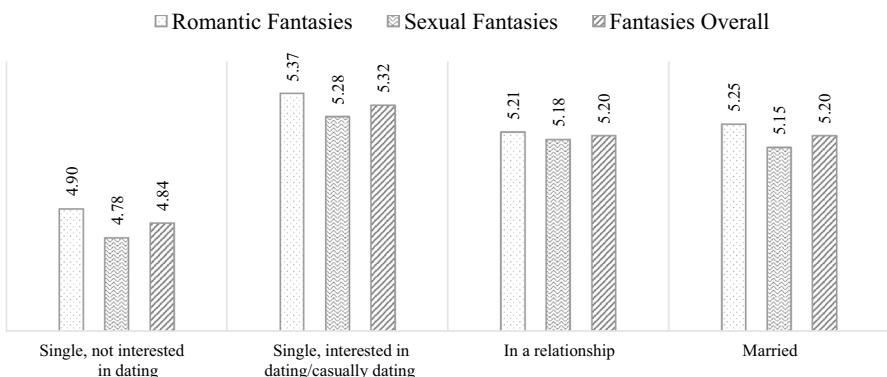
### Fantasy Acceptability and Relationship Status

Relationship status had a small effect on perceived acceptability of fantasizing, but only for those who identified as single and not interested in dating. Individuals identifying as single, not interested in dating, perceived fantasizing to be less acceptable compared to those interested in dating, in relationships, or who were married. Figure 5 displays mean values for acceptability of sexual, romantic, and overall fantasies, while Table 4 displays between group effect size differences for overall fantasizing acceptability.

**Table 3** Religious beliefs between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptability  
Religious beliefs between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptability (Cohen's d)

	Jewish	Muslim	Catholic	Christian, non-Catholic	Mormon	Native American	Spiritual, non-religious	Atheist	Agnostic
Jewish ( <i>n</i> =13)	—	1.21	1.16	0.82	0.36	1.53	0.52	0.43	0.34
Muslim ( <i>n</i> = 8)	—	—	0.22	-0.15	-0.54	0.51	-0.52	-0.57	-0.73
Catholic ( <i>n</i> =161)	—	—	—	0.31	-0.62	0.22	-0.61	-0.65	-0.78
Christian, Non-Catholic ( <i>n</i> =227)	—	—	—	—	-0.34	0.56	-0.30	-0.35	-0.47
Mormon ( <i>n</i> =8)	—	—	—	—	—	0.87	0.08	0.02	-0.07
Native American ( <i>n</i> =5)	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.90	-0.93	-1.09
Spiritual, Non-Religious ( <i>n</i> =70)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.06	-0.17
Atheist ( <i>n</i> =145)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	-0.10
Agnostic( <i>n</i> = 156)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

### Fantasy Acceptability By Relationship Status



**Fig. 5** Acceptability of fantasizing by relationship status

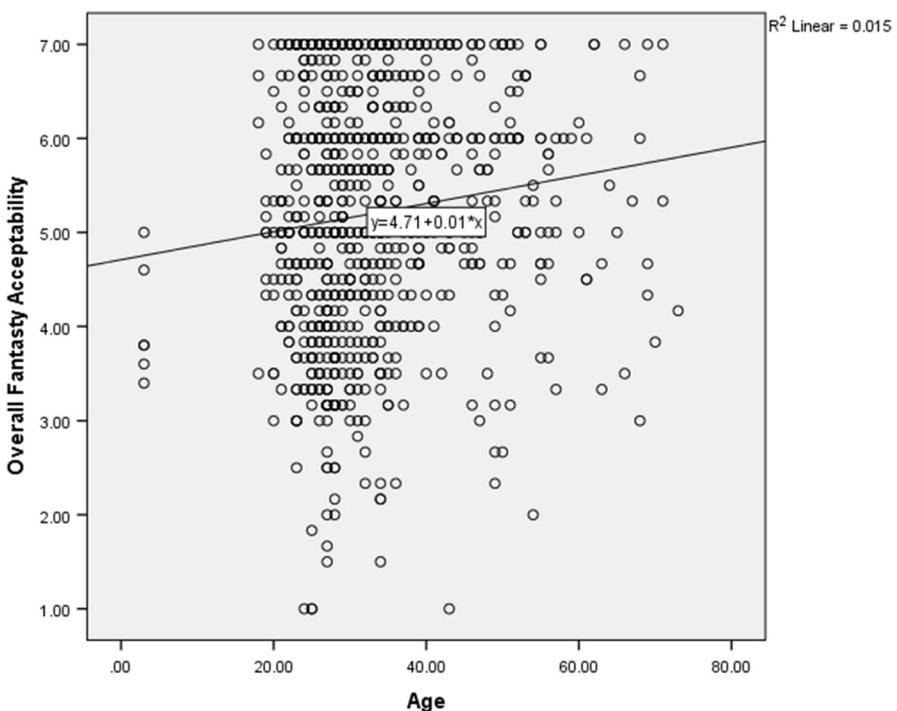
**Table 4** Relationship status between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptability

Relationship status between group effect sizes for overall fantasizing acceptability (Cohen's *d*)

	Single, not interested in dating	Single, interested in dating/casually dating	In a relationship	Married
Single, not interested in dating ( <i>n</i> =59)	–	−0.34	−0.26	−0.26
Single, interested in dating/casually dating ( <i>n</i> =223)	–	–	0.09	0.09
In a relationship ( <i>n</i> =255)	–	–	–	0.00
Married ( <i>n</i> =291)	–	–	–	–

### Fantasy Acceptability and Age

A regression analysis was run to determine how age impacted fantasy acceptability. Age significantly predicted variation in acceptability of sexual fantasizing  $F(1, 825)=12.01, p<0.001$ , accounting for 1.4% of the overall variance in acceptability of sexual fantasizing ( $R^2=0.014$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.013$ ), a small overall effect. Additionally, age significantly predicted variation in acceptability of romantic fantasizing  $F(1, 825)=12.01, p<0.001$ , accounting for 1.4% of the overall variance in acceptability of sexual fantasizing ( $R^2=0.014$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.012$ ), a small overall effect. As sexual and romantic fantasizing acceptability was nearly indistinguishable, Fig. 6 depicts the regression equation and the positive linear relationship between overall fantasizing acceptability and age, suggesting that as age increases, acceptance of sexual and romantic fantasizing also increases.



**Fig. 6** Acceptability of fantasizing by age

## Discussion

The current study aimed to better understand how acceptable, violating, and bothersome sexual and romantic fantasies are perceived. Results suggest that despite the current sentiment on socially and morally unacceptable physical acts, mental acts of fantasizing are not perceived as unacceptable. Further, people did not express that they would feel largely violated by somebody fantasizing about them romantically or sexually. No gender differences emerged based on fantasy type, indicating that men and women view fantasizing sexually and romantically as highly acceptable. However, differences did emerge based on the target of the fantasy. People perceived fantasizing sexually and romantically as more accepting when they were the target of the fantasies compared to when other people were the target of fantasies. This may occur from feelings of flattery when being fantasized about, and may change based on the fantasizer (i.e. attractive potential romantic partner fantasizing about you versus a perceiving perverted elderly male fantasizing about you). It is possible that the general nature of the fantasy (romantic or sexual) rather than specific fantasies being investigated impacted the overall reported acceptability of fantasies within this study, and how violated people reported potentially feeling from being the subject of someone else's fantasy. Fantasy acceptability may change if more details of the fantasy are known or if fantasies were more specific (ex. Rape fantasies vs. fantasies about having consensual sex).

Demographic differences, such as race/ethnicity and religion do not appear to impact fantasies greatly. Sexual orientation impacts fantasizing perceptions such that bisexual individuals were more accepting of fantasizing than heterosexual individuals, along with gay men and lesbians. It is possible that because bisexual individuals are interested in both sexes, they may have more potential targets to fantasize about, thus leading them to view fantasizing as more acceptable overall. Relationship status also impacted fantasizing perceptions such that those who identified as single and not interested in dating perceived fantasizing to be less acceptable than those interested in dating/casually dating, those in relationships, or those who were married. Additionally, age impacted fantasy acceptability perceptions such that perceptions of fantasy acceptability increased as age increased, but only slightly. Further research is needed to determine the causes of these demographic differences.

The current findings deepen the understanding of how society views fantasizing behavior and provide a basis for better understanding how various fantasy types are perceived. Moreover, through these results, individuals can begin to define boundaries for acceptable vs violating thoughts. These findings have implications on how fantasies relate to social role theory. Differences between romantic and sexual fantasizing perceptions did not emerge between men and women and can be interpreted to suggest that gender roles are potentially limited to exhibited traits, characteristics, and actions, rather than private thoughts. It is possible that the lack of differences between sexual and romantic fantasizing acceptability between men and women was due to lessened gendered expectations in society regarding men and women's career choices, socially held roles, and expected behaviors. Additionally, fantasies not being judged as unacceptable or violating, especially by many individuals with a variety of different religious beliefs, could indicate changing social norms surrounding sexual and romantic thoughts. In relation to evolutionary theory, the current findings provide evidence that fantasizing may not be linked to evolutionary mating strategies and preferences, or at least that these gendered strategies and preferences do not impact perceptions of the acceptability of fantasizing.

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations exist within the current research. First, as this project was a sub-set of a larger project, participants were recruited for a study about sexual and romantic fantasies; therefore, it is possible that individuals self-selecting to participate could hold more permissive attitudes towards fantasies in general compared to the general population. Additionally, the current study is limited to perceptions of generalized fantasizing behavior; future studies might consider expanding this knowledge to more specific instances of fantasizing, including details about who the fantasizer is. Potential for gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and age variations of the fantasizer could provide useful and interesting information about power dynamics, along with sexual discrimination and prejudice. Additionally, personality differences of perceivers could impact how acceptable fantasies are viewed. As aspects of sexual and romantic behavior are impacted by individual differences such

as attachment style, personality type, narcissism, etc., these factors are important to consider within participants for future studies. The lack of this information about the participants in the current study leaves a deficit of knowledge about how individual differences may impact acceptability of various fantasizing behavior.

Another limitation of the current investigation is that it only examined the acceptability of sexual and romantic fantasies in general rather than delving into specific fantasy acceptability. For instance, the acceptability of rape or pedophilia fantasies would likely result in different levels of acceptability compared to fantasies about going on a date or engaging in consensual sexual intercourse. To gain a deeper understanding of acceptability of various fantasies, more than just generally by type, future studies should examine the acceptability of specific fantasies. Future studies could also expand on the ecological validity of assessing acceptability of fantasizing by examining real-world fantasizing behavior and reactions to real-life situations.

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### Compliance with Ethical Statement

**Conflicts of interest** The author has no disclosures or conflicts of interest to state.

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